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ABSTRACT

This booklet, which was produced as a follow-up to the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education, examines the role of universities in adult learning. The booklet begins with a brief overview of the conference workshop on which it is based. The following issues and challenges facing universities are considered: inequalities within universities; the need for universities to open their doors to a broader range of adults; community needs; and economic needs. The next several sections cite examples of university adult education programs in various countries and illustrate how different countries are doing the following: defining the concept of university-based adult and continuing education; redefining universities' role in view of economic and technological changes; responding to the unique needs of different groups of adult learners, including members of indigenous populations; seeking to attract more students from minority groups and to increase their emphasis on community-based learning; conducting and sharing the results of community-based research; and developing partnerships with industry and business. The examples presented are drawn from South Africa, Australia, the United States, and Norway. Concluding the booklet are overviews of the dilemmas posed for university education by economic and social changes and the need to "mainstream" university adult learning. (MN)

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ED 434 995

A series of 29 booklets documenting workshops held at the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education

2a Universities and adult learning

Universities and the future of adult learning

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This publication has been produced by the UNESCO Institute for Education within the context of the follow-up to the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), held in Hamburg in 1997.

Readers are reminded that the points of view, selection of facts, and the opinions expressed in the booklets are those that were raised by panellists, speakers and participants during the workshop sessions and therefore do not necessarily coincide with official positions of the UNESCO or of the UNESCO Institute for Education Hamburg. The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the UNESCO Secretariat concerning the legal status of any country or territory, or its authorities, or concerning the delimitations of the frontiers of any country or territory.

Theme 2: Improving conditions and quality of adult learning

Booklets under this theme:

2a Universities and the future of adult learning

2b The multiplicity of research on 'Learning for All', a key for the 21st century

2c Global community of adult learning through information and documentation: developing a network of networks

2d Monitoring adult learning for knowledge-based policy-making

2e The politics and policies of the education of adults in a globally transforming society

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Foreword

In July 1997 the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education was held in Hamburg, organised by UNESCO and in particular the UNESCO Institute for Education, the agency's specialist centre on adult learning policy and research. Approximately 1500 delegates attended from all regions of the world, with representatives of 140 member states and some 400 NGOs. In addition to the work of the commissions and plenary which debated the official documents of the Conference The Hamburg Declaration and The Agenda for the Future, there were 33 workshops organised around the themes and sub-themes of the Conference.

As part of its CONFINTEA follow-up strategy, the UNESCO Institute for Education has produced this series of 29 booklets based on the presentations and discussions held during the Conference. The recordings of all the workshops were transcribed and synthesized over one year, edited, and then formatted and designed. A tremendous amount of work has gone into this process. Linda King, coordinator of the monitoring and information strategy for CONFINTEA, was responsible for overseeing the whole process. Madhu Singh, senior research specialist at UIE, undertook the mammoth task of writing almost all the booklets based on an analysis of the sessions. She was helped in the later stages by Gonzalo Retamal, Uta Papen and Linda King. Christopher McIntosh was technical editor, Matthew Partridge designed the layout and Janna Lowrey was both transcriber and translator.

The booklets are intended to draw out the central issues and concerns of each of the CONFINTEA workshops. They are the memory of an event that marked an important watershed in the field of adult learning. We hope that they will be of use both to those who were able to attend CONFINTEA V and those who were not. We look forward to your comments, feedback and continuing collaboration with the UNESCO Institute for Education.

Paul Bélanger,
Director, UNESCO Institute for Education, Hamburg
and Secretary General of CONFINTEA

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Universities and the future of adult learning

Introduction

Universities are renegotiating and redefining their relations with civil society, the various economic partners and the public in many different ways. Notions of adult and lifelong learning are central to this institutional redefinition. Lifelong learning can only take place by building bridges between members of the academic community, the socio-cultural and economic realities around them and the day-to-day actions of citizens attempting to create better living and working conditions.

CONFINTEA V provided space for discussions on the links between university and society with the aim of clarifying the role of higher education from the perspective of lifelong learning.

The first session of the thematic working group dealing with the subject of Universities and Adult Education was chaired by Madeleine Blais, University of Montreal, Canada. Invited speakers were Budd Hall, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Canada; Funeka Loza and Shirley Walters, Centre for Adult and Continuing Education, University of the Western Cape, South Africa; Jennifer Newman and Griff Foley, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia. The panel of the second session, chaired by John Morris from the University of New Brunswick in Canada, comprised Mechthild Hart, DePaul University, USA; Renuka Narang, University of Mumbai, India; Shahrzad Mojab, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Canada; Ina Grieb and Claudia Lohrenscheidt, University of Oldenburg, Germany.

The issues and challenges

Inequalities within universities

Universities world-wide tend too often to replicate structural inequalities, socioeconomic cleavages and sexual disparities. Female students, for example, are under-represented in natural sciences and in the teaching staff. There is therefore much lost ground that needs to be made up to ensure equality of opportunities across gender, social status and age. A major challenge for universities is to restructure and transform themselves in order to tackle seriously the inequalities within their institutions and to give access to generations of adults who were not able to enjoy their right to higher education in the first period of their lives.

Opening the doors

Some universities are innovating: reaching out to the adult learners, adopting new admission policies for mature students, prolonging the time schedule to accommodate adults, opening information and counselling centres, establishing links between research, training and service to the community, cooperating with economic partners, dealing with issues such as gender inequalities and racial discrimination. Universities need to be opened up to people with different occupational backgrounds. New forms of continuing training need to be provided, and universities need to become more responsive to the community and active professional needs, and to the learning aspirations of the present generation of adult citizens.

Community needs

Many women and men need new expertise and skills to be more effective in their communities as "development workers" in such domains as health, community building, agriculture, environment and family planning. They require training and intellectual support from universities, if they are effectively to play their key role in the process of forging a democratic ethos and culture of human rights and of ensuring sustainable development at the local level.

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Economic needs

A new partnership is required between universities and the various economic agencies to face the challenges of world economic competition and of new technologies. Higher education institutions are increasingly being called upon to transform their basic form and structure to become 'lifelong learning' institutions, which enable employees and unemployed people to access relevant learning opportunities at different times, in different ways, for different purposes, at various stages of their careers. Lifelong learning institutions have to be responsive to the needs of different economic sectors and able to meet the training and education needs of the economy and government in flexible and appropriate ways.

University-based adult and continuing education

University-based adult and continuing education has a range of meanings. It includes:

- flexibilisation of programme delivery to meet the adults' specific requirements (time schedule, admission norms, counselling, intermediary diploma);
- university extension work;
- professional continuing education;
- university level distance education in a wide variety of methods of delivery;
- training of adult educators at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels;
- research on adult learning in all its complex dimensions;
- new partnerships with industry and civil society.

The pattern of adult participation in higher education institutions differs from country to country.

In South Africa, for example, 'adult education' in universities has mainly referred to the training of adult educators, as well as to research and 'continuing education studies'. Distance higher education institutions and open learning systems are still underdeveloped. Systems are being

put in place, in line with the emerging National Qualifications Framework, so as to give newly or non-formally acquired knowledge and competence a credited status. This is considered an important motivation factor for adult learners who plan to attend university-level programmes.

Adult and Continuing Education and Extension at the University of Mumbai, India

The initiatives of the Department of Adult and Continuing Education include:

- opening of a new community education centre;
- accreditation of work experience and work projects;
- linkages between businesses, industry and university to improve employability of learners;
- improvement of the quality of learning through training programmes and development of courses;
- empowerment of women through extension projects and establishment of a women's cell;
- special courses related to health, environment and population issues;
- short-term continuing education courses;
- management courses;
- functioning as a nodal agency for adult learning at the regional level.

Redefining the role of the universities

The university, as it has been traditionally known, is undergoing dramatic changes in the face of increasing pressure to respond to market forces and technological opportunities, in the context of the competitive global economy and the consequent need for continuing education. At the same time, civil societies are becoming more active. New social initiatives are calling upon their participants to expand their competencies through learning and to increase continuously their capacity for effective intervention. This has given rise to the largest ever social demand for adult learning at all levels. Competing demands between market forces and social needs are calling for new contributions from universities.

In the perspective of lifelong learning there is a shift in the understanding of adult learning toward a more inclusive definition to respond both to labour market demands and to the needs of civil society, and to meet the multiplicity of demands which come from a range of local and regional communities and organisations.

Consequently, universities are called upon to address, both in their training and research functions, urgent social issues such as health, welfare, women, and transfer of appropriate technology to the communities. New knowledge is being generated through interaction with the community, curricula are becoming relevant to the life of the people and many new learning avenues are being opened up.

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The University of the Western Cape (UWC)

UWC is historically a black university, set up in 1961 under apartheid legislation to serve people classified as 'coloured' and 'black'. In the late 1970s UWC developed a history of the anti-apartheid struggle. UWC's distinctive national and international profile can be characterised by the description 'the people's university'. This profile is based on the university's commitment to support communities that were historically excluded from higher education.

Initiatives for adults:

- establishment of the Centre for Adult and Continuing Education (CACE) in 1985 for training and research;
- second chance education;
- leadership training: 'learning to govern';
- support to trainers in social movements and organisations;
- cooperation with Human Resource Development (HRD) initiatives in the economic field;
- creation of a mission to help transform the UWC into a lifelong learning institution.

The learning needs of adults

The enormous variety of experience and motivations among learners shows that individual lives cannot be strictly partitioned into needs of work, home, or community affairs.

Many of the learners are playing catalytic roles in their communities and places of work. It is therefore very important that they should have access to training opportunities which take into account their daily lived experiences and their economic, social and personal needs.

Teaching and learning strategies must be as holistic and accessible as possible and be rooted in the daily reality of individual learners.

Examples of learners in CACE's 'township learning' programme at UWC

Florence Diamshe is principal of a primary school in a squatter or informal housing community. She is 41 years old. She wanted to do the course to help her develop her community, counter male dominance on her school committee, motivate women to take a leadership position and to learn more about such things as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Anthony Gordon works at a corporation that supplies electricity. He has a standard 8 education. He was a manual labourer and is now a trainer in Adult Basic Education and Training.

From a curriculum perspective they should:

- deal with the real issues that people are confronted with;
- enable a democratic and socially just ethos to be nurtured and sustained;
- aim to enhance the marketable skills of learners;
- induct learners into a process of lifelong learning which includes the discipline of studying, the management of time and resources.

Programmes of adult education for special communities such as minorities and indigenous peoples need to start by conducting a survey of learner needs. Particularly, minorities, migrants and indigenous peoples are linguistically and culturally embedded in their social and natural environments. Past experience shows that such programmes have taken off the ground because they have been under the control of local communities and have had community support. It is important to create a space for the university within local communities, and vice versa, a space for communities in universities.

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Indigenous peoples possess an inheritance of knowledge of enormous richness and complexity, based on paradigms very different from those upheld in the universities. Indigenous knowledge is, for example, based on a close symbiosis with nature. Care should be taken that indigenous knowledge is not destroyed by attempts to impose western scientific approaches along with their tendency to exploit the environment and nature.

The Aboriginal Education Course at the University of Technology, Sydney, Australia

- There is a three years part-time programme (already running for 14 years) leading to a certificate in adult education for aboriginal learners.
- There are three Aboriginal faculty members, three members of staff.
- Two-thirds of learners are women.
- There is a high rate of completion because of strong family, work or community support when applying and during the programme, and of spaces given to cultural aboriginal manifestations.
- There is student counselling.
- Articles are published in a variety of journals.

Community-based learning

Many universities are seeking to attract students from minority groups into adult education programmes. But this in itself is not enough. Community-based programmes are being developed which encourage students to grapple with issues of social justice. A term now frequently used is "service learning" that is to say, an "education for the common good and the creation of a just and livable society". In the planning of such programmes, workshops and debates have been held to discuss such questions as: What is the common good? What is a just and liveable society? How can learning be organised around these themes? What connections can be established with non-academic communities?

Service Learning Network at the DePaul University, Chicago, USA

Founded a century ago, DePaul University, with its constituent colleges, has set itself the mission of being a non-traditional, experienced-based and flexible higher education institution for adult working students.

It provides a university access to different communities – geographically, culturally and politically distinct – to share their knowledge with faculty and with students in classes and there is a give and take on both sides.

Community-based learning is learning through working with the university to collect data from communities for the benefit of their citizens. The overall emphasis is on participatory learning. It offers courses in research techniques for gathering data and throwing light on problems relating to youth, education, economic development, health, human services, affordable housing and human capacity. The conclusions can be used to formulate policies adjusted to the community's needs. The university is used as a resource that provides tools for addressing a variety of educational issues: How does learning occur within a community?

How do communities bound together accomplish their goals? How do they put aside their own needs to develop a collective voice representing all of their interests? How do they learn to find relevant data sources? How do they manage power relations in society?

Community-based research

In community-based research, community leaders are afforded the opportunity to share their research and experience publicly and in classroom settings. It entails organising seminars, special forums, lectures and meetings that bring together diverse groups of people who are concerned with the critical issues facing society. It brings together faculty, researchers and community leaders/activists who share similar research interests around specific community concerns, such as welfare and economic self-sufficiency, that have direct practical implications for community initiatives. It offers opportunities to discuss research results regularly in joint meetings between researchers and community activists, where ideas are exchanged and opened up for critical comment by all involved in the project.

Studying subjugated forms of knowledge presents a number of challenges for adult education researchers. University-based educators have to be able to put themselves in the role of a learner. Universities must question the taken-for-granted paradigms of knowledge and learn from people who are generally excluded from them. Knowledge can be created in very different ways from those promoted in universities. It is necessary to learn to understand the 'order of things' in other cultural contexts. At the same time universities and the academic life are a useful context for conceptualising and analysing descriptions of communities.

In community-based research there is a recognition that teaching and learning take place in both the world of the community and the world of the university. Adult educators have to learn to switch to the role of learners when they deal with people who are from different cultures and who think and theorize differently. A lot of theories need to be reinterpreted when knowledge is located and coded somewhere else rather than in the universities.

A researcher has to be a true participant in a community, or at least to be living in it, in order to learn its language and to gain access to its knowledge.

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Partnerships between universities, industry and businesses

University departments are being challenged to move from being involved with only community-based learning to a much broader spectrum of university provision which will respond more directly to labour market demands. The shift is in part related to global economic development and to the growing need for increasing productivity through further training. The language of competency-based, outcome-oriented education is somewhat new to many universities, although it has become part of the normal discourse of some higher education institutions in different regions of the world.

In addition to research and development, universities are increasingly introducing continuing education courses and finding new ways to meet the rising competency requirements of enterprises and representatives of employees.

The Buskerud State College (BSC) in Norway

The BSC College, with a long tradition of international cooperation, has developed close working relationships with industry. It provides for the continuing education of graduates and other technical specialists in the field of information technology.

A Diploma in Information Technology is offered. The inscription's requirement allows flexible entry, based on previous qualifications and work experience, and also on recognition of credits taken in other institutions and of certificates of in-service programmes.

Dilemmas posed for university adult education

Will national concerns to be more competitive swamp local concerns for social and economic justice? Will human capital become the new orthodoxy of lifelong learning? Will the market's needs dominate at the expense of the broader social and political needs?

Paradoxically, social movements are declining in power in several parts of the world, as countries are achieving a democratic form of government. The advent of democracy in many countries including South Africa and Latin America has moved the spotlight from social movements to demands for a more formal and vocational policy oriented work.

Market forces are increasingly expected to influence the structure and form of university provision, which may leave little space for people-centred approaches and social issues. The university courses, which will be subsidised by the state and industry in partnership, will have to encompass both the needs of the labour market and of the learners and maintain the level of quality expected from higher adult education. This means appropriate criteria for tailor-made curriculum development, inserting certificate courses into national qualifications frameworks, giving voice to the learners in assessment of their needs andseeking funding from mixed sources.

Emphasising the links between higher education and the world of work and enhancing cooperation between university and industry are needed , but it is not only work that needs to be recognised but also the other aspects of people's lives. The requirements of the employers and the needs of employees need to be balanced.

Conclusions: University adult education from the margin to the centre

Universities all over the world are faced with very similar issues and problems within their respective countries. The problem of marginality is apparent. While university adult education has tended in the past to work on the margin, it has now to develop cooperation and support from the university as a whole. On the other hand, university based adult education units need to support the university in its efforts to change and become more responsible for transforming itself into a lifelong learning organisation. Partnerships outside the institutions have to be developed. Choices need to be made. Universities should rely on co-operation with economic institutions or groups, but must also meet the needs of the less advantaged groups in society.

Universities are opening their doors in various ways. There are more adults coming to university premises than ever before. Consequently, there is a need for university adult education to be present in all departments. As universities are becoming lifelong education institutions, the challenge for the next few years will be, through cross-faculty communication, to support the opening of universities, programmes to all the adult population in need of university level credit and non-credit education, and of university expertise.

The "mainstreaming" of university adult learning has become crucial to this transition phase of higher education and to the strengthening of university-society relationship, which has traditionally concentrated on the education of the young generation, but must now be extended to the whole life-span.

CONFINTEA V Follow up

1 The International Congress of University Adult Education which was founded following the 1960 UNESCO conference on adult education will be serving as an umbrella organisation of follow-up efforts and discussions of CONFINTEA V.

2 The recommendations of CONFINTEA V have been integrated into the follow-up to the UNESCO International Conference on Higher Education held in October 1998.

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The CONFINTEA logo, designed by Michael Smitheram of Australia, represents the lines on the palm of a hand. These lines are universal and yet different for each subject. They celebrate cultural diversity and the joy of learning.

Theme 2

Improving conditions and quality of adult learning

Booklets under this theme:

a Universities and the future of adult learning
b The multiplicity of research on 'Learning for All', a key for the 21st century
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